



MEDIA RELEASE

Government's intention of formalising waste pickers' role in the waste economy

Immediate Release

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The Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa (IWMSA) fully supports the Minister of Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa's recent announcement in Parliament to incorporate South Africa's waste pickers in the formal waste economy. The non-profit industry body acknowledges the role that waste pickers play in the waste management industry and stress the necessity to improve this sector's working conditions.

South Africa's waste pickers play a substantial role in the country's waste management industry. The informal waste sector recovers recyclables from household waste streams as well as waste materials sent to landfill sites. According to a recent Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) study*, it is estimated that a staggering 80-90% (by weight) of paper and packaging are sourced from informal waste pickers. Lead researcher on the study, Prof. Linda Godfrey further emphasized that the informal sector of approximately 60 000 to 90 000 waste pickers, have saved municipalities between R309.2 to R748.8 million in landfill airspace in 2014 alone.

President of the IWMSA, Prof. Suzan Oelofse, says that waste pickers are contributing towards a circular economy – a restorative system where very little waste is generated. Job creation is another benefit of the waste pickers' role in the waste sector; more jobs can be created in the recycling industry when more recyclable materials are collected.

"Waste pickers are making valuable resources available for reintroduction into the economy while saving valuable landfill airspace. In some instances, informal waste pickers are the only people recovering recyclables in many municipalities. Without their contribution, there will be a lot less recyclables available for the recycling industry," mentions Oelofse.

Changing behaviour and mind-sets will be one challenge for incorporating the informal sector in to the formal waste economy. "Recognising informal pickers' efforts and improving their working conditions will be a positive result of formalising this particular sector. However, many pickers are entrepreneurs at heart and will therefore not necessarily find a formal job attractive where they need to prescribe to a formal system or structure," explains Oelofse.

Another CSIR study** for the Green Fund titled: 'Evaluation of co-operatives as a developmental vehicle to support job creation and SME development in the waste sector' highlighted that waste and recycling co-operatives face numerous challenges; has a high failure rate; and is not creating sustainable

businesses or jobs. Oelofse reiterates that this is an aspect to be mindful of; formalising the informal sector through registering co-operatives or other formal employment measures, may not be sustainable.

“As the industry body for the waste management sector, the IWMSA will assist government where best possible within our mandate,” concludes Oelofse.

*http://www.csir.co.za/nre/pollution_and_waste/docs/Policy%20Brief_Informal%20Sector_CSIR%20final.pdf

**http://www.sagreenfund.org.za/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Policy-Brief-1_Final.compressed.pdf

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Media contact:
Winet Fourie
Mobile: 081 412 5680
Email: winet@reputationmatters.co.za